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Two factors regarding the helpfulness of parents, school personnel, and peers to students with different educational aspirations are studied (1) whether students of different aspirations talk with the same people about school problems, and (2) how helpful are the persons with whom the students do talk. The data were obtained from questionnaire responses of 3,986 boys and 4,079 girls in grade 10 classes of California schools. Using a four-point scale, these students rated the helpfulness of six persons who are important representatives of the home, the school, and the peer group. The students were stratified on five levels of educational aspiration. Similarities among groups were somewhat greater than differences. For low aspirants as well as for high aspirants, more students talk to Mother about school problems than to Father, school personnel or others. School personnel, particularly the counselor were perceived as most helpful. High aspirants were found to have more involvement with parents and school personnel than low aspirants while the reverse is the case in regard to peers. (PS)

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Helpfulness of Parents, School Personnel, and Peers to Students With Different Educational Aspirations

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The Center for Research and Development
in Higher Education
University of California, Berkeley

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This study is part of a five year longitudinal project investigating the decision-making process in adolescents as they move through high school into college or work.[1] There are two main threads in our approach to decision making: one is more sociological--it looks at the opportunities and barriers inherent in institutional channels; the other is more psychological--it looks at the ways others help or hinder students as they move through these channels. The present paper focuses on the latter--the student's relationships with others.

It is a common observation, supported by research (Bowerman & Kinch, 1959, p. 208; Rosen, 1948, p. 157) that in the course of development the student's emotional allegiance shifts from home to the outside world--particularly to peers. What is less often recognized is that the residue of the student's earlier bond to parents still has considerable influence on him. In our own research, for example, we found that while students say that peers, more than parents, think the way they do, parents are still their prime object of respect and admiration (Tillery et al., p. 27). Further, a review of other research suggests

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[1] This project is sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board in conjunction with the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley.

that while the student feels happier at school than at home, (Yabroff, 1966, p. 6), parents' disapproval means more to him than that of his teachers (Coleman, 1961, p. 5).

We also have reason to suspect that the relations between self and others will vary for different types of students. Research shows, for example, that low ability and/or lower class students feel less parental pressure for good grades (Neugarten, 1946, p. 311; Yabroff, 1966, p. 5) and perceive school less favorably than their peers (Yabroff, 1966, p. 8).

In our investigation of the influence of others on adolescent decision making, two things have become clear to us: first, that we must look at the influence of any particular person in relation to others; and second, that we must take account of the possible variations between different groups of students.

In this paper, we attempt to converge these two factors in a study of the help significant others give students with problems concerning school work, such as courses, grades, and studying. First, we ask whether students with different educational aspirations talk to the same people about these problems. Then we examine the relative helpfulness of these people to students in the different aspiration groups.

Procedure

The data for this report were obtained from questionnaire responses of 3986 boys and 4079 girls in grade ten classes of California schools.[1] These students rated the helpfulness of

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[1] Parallel data are also available for samples of grade ten students in Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina.

six persons thought to be important representatives of home, school, and peer-group; namely, Mother and Father; Counselor and Best-Liked Teacher; Best-Liked Boy and Best-Liked Girl. Each of these persons was rated as either "Extremely Helpful," "Quite Helpful," "A Little Helpful," "Not Helpful At All," in reference to his or her helpfulness with school problems; or the student indicated that he didn't "talk to this person about school problems."

In the tables to follow, students have been stratified by sex and by education aspiration. The five aspirational levels are: 1) leave school as soon as possible; 2) graduate from high school; 3) attend junior college or some special technical-vocational school; 4) graduate from a four-year college; and 5) seek a post-graduate college degree.

Results

Table 1 presents--for each person rated--the percentage of students in the five aspirational groups who indicated that they talked to that person about school problems. The rank order of these percentages is also reported.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

A cursory examination of Table 1 suggests that while there is considerable variation in the percentages across aspiration

groups and for the different persons, a large percentage of all the students sampled do talk with parents, school personnel, and peers about school problems. Indeed, the lowest percentage observed represents nearly half the cases.[1]

Nevertheless, examination of the percentages across aspiration groups brings out a clear, if not totally consistent, tendency for more students with high aspirations to talk with parents, school personnel, and the same-sex peer about school problems than students with low aspirations.[2] In contrast, more students with low aspirations talk with the opposite-sex peer than those with high aspirations.

However, when we look at the rank order of these percentages, we find that for boys the relative prominence of each person is quite similar across aspiration groups. Mother holds first rank; Father, Counselor, and Teacher, the middle ranks; and peers, the lower ranks. Yet, while the differences are not great, there is a tendency for boys aspiring to a Four-Year College or beyond, and boys aspiring to a Junior College and below to be distinguished by the rank order of Father and Counselor. More high aspirants talk with Father than with Counselor while more low aspirants talk with Counselor than with Father. Thus, the pattern for high aspirants orders parents first, then school personnel, and peers last. In

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[1] This percentage of 48.5 is for Post Grad boys in reference to Best-Liked Boy.

[2] However, this tendency appears weak in Boys' percentages for Teacher.

contrast, the pattern for low aspirants orders Mother first, followed by Counselor, then Father, Teacher, and peers.

For girls, as for boys, Mother holds first rank. However, the rank order for the other persons is somewhat less uniform than that observed for boys. Comparison of the three highest aspiration groups with the Leave High School girls shows that adults rank higher for high aspirants than low aspirants, while both peers rank higher for low aspirants than high aspirants. The High School Graduate girls appear to share with the Leave High School girls the relatively low ranks for Father and Teacher, and the relatively high rank for Best-Liked Girl. But at the same time, the High School Graduate girls share with the three high aspiration groups the relatively high rank for counselor. It is interesting to note the low rank of teacher for girls in all aspiration groups.

Differences in the patterns of significant others with whom students talk about school problems appear between sexes as well as within aspiration groups for each sex. Girls are distinguished from boys in the prominence of Best-Liked Girl as a person with whom they talk about school problems. This is especially apparent when the relative ranks of Best-Liked Girl are compared with those of Teacher. Specifically, Best-Liked Girl ranks higher than Teacher for girls, while the reverse is true for boys. Furthermore, for low aspirants we also find that Best-Liked Girl ranks higher than Father for girls, but not for boys. Examination of the percentages

for Best-Liked Boy also suggest that girls--with the exception of the Four-Year College group--also talk more with Best-Liked Boy than boys do.

From our examination of Table 1, we gain the impression that while there is a rather monolithic tendency for students in all aspiration groups to talk with Mother about school problems, these groups are distinguished both by the number of students who go to others for help, and by the pattern of persons who hold second order prominence.

Having highlighted the similarities and differences in the patterning of persons with whom students of differing aspirations talk about school problems, let us now examine the help students say they receive from these persons. Table 2 presents--for students indicating that they talk with these persons--the percentages of students in each aspiration group reporting that the persons are either "Extremely Helpful" or "Quite Helpful." The rank order of these percentages is also reported.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

First, we observe a tendency for high aspirants to perceive parents and school personnel as more helpful than low aspirants. It appears, then, that not only do more high aspirants talk with parents and school personnel about school problems than low aspirants (Table 1), but that more high aspirants also find these persons helpful. The reverse tendency in regard to peers,

observed in Table 1, also appears in Table 2. Low aspirants perceive peers as more helpful than high aspirants. However, whereas this tendency was observed only for the opposite-sex peer in Table 1, the findings hold for both the opposite- and same-sex peer in Table 2. We do note, though, that the tendency in regard to Best-Liked Girl is less consistent for girls than for boys.

Despite these differences in percentages, we observe that the persons holding the highest ranks are remarkably similar across aspiration groups. Counselor ranks first and Teacher either second or third. However, we do find that the relative position of parents and peers discriminates high and low aspirants. For the three highest groups--both boys and girls--Mother and Father hold middle ranks; peers, the lowest. Boys aspiring to High School Graduation also show the same pattern. In contrast we find that for boys wanting to Leave High School, Mother ranks last, but Best-Liked Girl, third; for girls wanting to Leave High School and for those aspiring to High School Graduation, Father ranks fifth or last, but Best-Liked Boy, second or third. These findings suggest that in contrast to high aspirants, low aspirants find more help in the opposite-sex peer than in the opposite-sex parent.

The major sex difference observed in these data concerns the rank order of Mother and Father. Father ranks higher for boys than for girls, but Mother ranks higher for girls than for boys. This tendency appears for all students except boys aspiring to High School Graduation, or Junior College and Vocational School.

For them, Mother ranks higher than Father. However, the differences in percentages for Mother and Father are not great; thus, this apparent divergence from the other aspiration groups may not hold up in future research.

Discussion

This paper has been concerned with the helpfulness of parents, school personnel, and peers to students with different educational aspirations. We first asked whether students of different aspirations talk with the same people about school problems; then, for those students who do talk with others, we investigated the relative helpfulness of these persons. The data suggest that the similarities among groups are somewhat greater than the differences. In Table 1 we observed that for low aspirants as well as for high aspirants, more students talk to Mother about school problems than to Father, school personnel, or peers. In Table 2 we observed that school personnel--particularly Counselor--are perceived as the most helpful to students in all aspiration groups.

The most provocative aspect of these findings is the suggestion that the person with whom most students talk about school problems is not the person students find most helpful. That Counselor and Teacher are both perceived as more helpful than Mother may in part reflect the fact that school personnel are in a better position to evaluate the student's problems. However, other research suggests another hypothesis: that students feel better about themselves at school than at home and are, therefore, more receptive

to help. Yabroff (1966, p. 6), for instance, found that while home is the place students feel most like a failure, school is the place they feel most self-respect. The work of Block (1937, p. 199) and Landis and Stone (1952) also supports the idea that when school problems are taken home they may create dissension between student and parent. Counselors and teachers, therefore, may be in a unique position to help the student with school problems by helping him to accept help.

The major findings in this study concerning differences between aspiration groups suggest that high aspirants have more involvement with parents and school personnel than low aspirants, while the reverse is the case in regard to peers. It may be that the absence of parents in the homes of many low aspiring students, as well as the lack of adequate counseling services in many schools account for some of these differences. However, the Coleman report (1966, pp. 186, 529) suggests that these conditions may not be as widespread as we formerly believed.

Possibly the low aspirant, because he is not motivated toward academic achievement, does not see his lack of achievement as a "problem." This idea is supported in other data from our own project (Tillery et al., p. 16). For instance, a fourth of our sample of boys who want to leave high school indicate that they feel no conflict about "Working hard in school" versus "Getting by the easy way."

The non-acceptance of the values of the school culture is an expression of the widely recognized alienation of low aspiring

students (Stinchcombe, 1964, p. 75). And other research suggests that this alienation involves not only sexual precocity (Kinsey, 1953, p. 303), but also earlier formation of sex role identity (Stinchcombe, 1964, p. 117). We may well be witnessing in our data part of this desire for self-definition as an adult in the low aspirant's movement from the opposite-sex parent to the opposite-sex peer. We anticipate that counselors and teachers will be even more helpful to students as they recognize the complexity of interpersonal relationships, particularly as these relationships vary for students with different educational aspirations.

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TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF TENTH GRADE STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS INDICATING THEY TALK WITH PARENTS, SCHOOL PERSONNEL, AND PEERS ABOUT SCHOOL PROBLEMS [a]

BOYS

Person	STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS																			
	LEAVE H. S.				H. S. GRAD				JC OR VOC				4 YR GRAD				POST GRAD			
	N[b]	n[c]	%	R[d]	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R
Mother	85	55	64.7	1	646	543	84.1	1	1109	979	88.3	1	1245	1162	93.3	1	866	802	92.6	1
Father	82	50	61.0	3	645	508	78.8	3	1104	903	81.8	3	1241	1105	89.0	2	860	768	89.3	2
Counselor	84	54	64.3	2	631	502	79.6	2	1102	908	82.4	2	1234	1040	84.3	3	861	738	85.7	3
Teacher	81	49	60.5	4	637	444	69.7	4	1108	750	67.7	4	1243	847	68.1	4	868	583	67.2	4
Boy	79	36	45.6	6	628	342	54.5	5	1099	603	54.9	5	1234	714	57.9	5	856	479	56.0	5
Girl	83	48	57.8	5	634	338	53.3	6	1104	602	54.5	6	1234	621	50.3	6	864	419	48.5	6
GIRLS																				
Mother	66	46	69.7	1	675	582	86.2	1	1544	1448	93.8	1	1165	1102	94.6	1	586	543	92.7	1
Father	69	39	56.5	5	667	466	69.9	4	1535	1233	80.3	3	1159	962	83.0	3	586	474	80.9	3
Counselor	69	40	58.0	4	672	511	76.0	2	1546	1282	82.9	2	1157	990	85.6	2	589	526	89.3	2
Teacher	69	37	53.6	6	671	395	58.9	6	1546	961	62.2	5	1162	741	63.8	5	587	409	69.7	5
Boy	67	43	64.2	3	674	413	61.3	5	1544	901	58.4	6	1156	635	54.9	6	588	348	59.2	6
Girl	65	44	67.7	2	669	483	72.2	3	1535	1182	77.0	4	1165	937	80.4	4	585	447	76.4	4

a) See text for a more precise description of the question categories, persons rated, and aspiration groups.

b) "N" refers to the total number of students in each sub-sample except those not responding to the question. The average no response rate across sub-samples is about 2% for both boys and girls.

c) "n" refers to the total number of students indicating that they talk to this person about school problems.

d) "R" indicates rank.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF TENTH GRADE STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS RATING PARENTS, SCHOOL PERSONNEL, AND PEERS AS "EXTREMELY" OR "QUITE" HELPFUL WITH SCHOOL PROBLEMS [a]

BOYS

Person	STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS																			
	LEAVE H. S.				H. S. GRAD				JC OR VOC				4 YR GRAD				POST GRAD			
	N[b]	n[c]	%	R[d]	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R	N	n	%	R
Counselor	54	32	59.2	1	502	320	63.7	1	908	633	69.7	1	1040	753	72.4	1	738	532	72.0	1
Teacher	49	28	57.1	2	444	256	57.7	2	750	435	58.0	2	847	498	58.8	3	583	388	66.6	2
Mother	55	21	38.2	6	543	286	52.7	3	979	545	55.7	3	1162	675	58.1	4	802	478	59.6	4
Father	50	25	50.0	4	508	261	51.4	4	903	456	50.5	4	1105	657	59.5	2	768	491	63.9	3
Girl	48	26	54.2	3	338	168	49.7	5	602	261	43.4	5	621	250	40.3	6	419	164	39.1	5
Boy	36	17	47.2	5	342	136	39.8	6	603	228	37.8	6	714	289	40.5	5	479	175	36.5	6
GIRLS																				
Counselor	40	27	67.5	1	511	355	69.4	1	1282	904	70.5	1	990	686	69.2	1	526	380	72.2	1
Teacher	37	20	54.1	3	395	226	57.2	2	961	568	59.1	2	741	478	64.5	2	409	276	67.5	3
Mother	46	23	50.0	4	582	301	51.7	4	1448	851	58.8	3	1102	701	63.6	3	543	373	68.7	2
Father	39	15	38.5	6	466	233	50.0	5	1233	661	53.6	4	962	566	58.8	4	474	295	62.2	4
Girl	44	21	47.7	5	483	193	40.0	6	1182	523	44.2	6	937	421	44.9	5	447	199	44.5	6
Boy	43	25	58.1	2	413	222	53.8	3	901	468	51.9	5	635	283	44.6	6	348	169	48.6	5

a) See text for a more precise description of the question categories, persons rated, and aspiration groups.

b) "N" refers to the total number of students indicating that they talk to this person about school problems. The numbers under "n" in Table 1 and "N" in Table 2 denote the same students.

c) "n" refers to the number of students out of the total "N" rating this person as either "Extremely helpful" or "Quite helpful".

d) "R" indicates rank.